

Decision Memo
Willis Blow Down Salvage Project
USDA Forest Service Southwest Region, Kaibab National Forest
North Kaibab Ranger District
Coconino County, Arizona

Background

The North Kaibab Willis Blow Down Salvage Project (T 39 N, R 2 E, Sections 8 and 17) was proposed to respond to goals and objectives of the Kaibab National Forest Land Management Plan (KNFLMP). A comparison of the existing conditions of the project area and the desired future conditions from the Forest Plan (KNFLMP page 1) indicated a need for:

- “Protection, through ecologically compatible means, of all forest and rangeland resources from depredations by forest and rangeland pests.”

An intense wind event occurred on September 28 or 29, 2004. This event caused blow down or wind breakage mortality of 160 live over story ponderosa pine trees (> 9” dbh) over a 26 acre area (See Picture 1; Figures 1 and 2).

All the downed trees from this event occur within 500 feet of forest roads FR 248A, FR639, or FR639H in the northern portion of the North Kaibab Ranger District (Kaibab National Forest) along Cooper Ridge. Actions to remove the downed green trees and treat residual slash over a 38 acre area are needed in order to remove bark beetle brood sites, reduce wildfire risk and provide for salvaging the merchantable value in the downed green trees before they deteriorate. Removing and salvaging the dead trees is necessary to mitigate the bark beetle outbreak potential. Standing portions of wind broken trees would be retained for wildlife. Added benefits of this salvage operation would include repairing ¼ mile of damaged range fence and clearing road FR639, a designated “keep open” road, which is currently blocked with downed timber, preventing Forest Service, range permittee, and public vehicle passage. This project is within the Ryan grazing allotment.

Decision

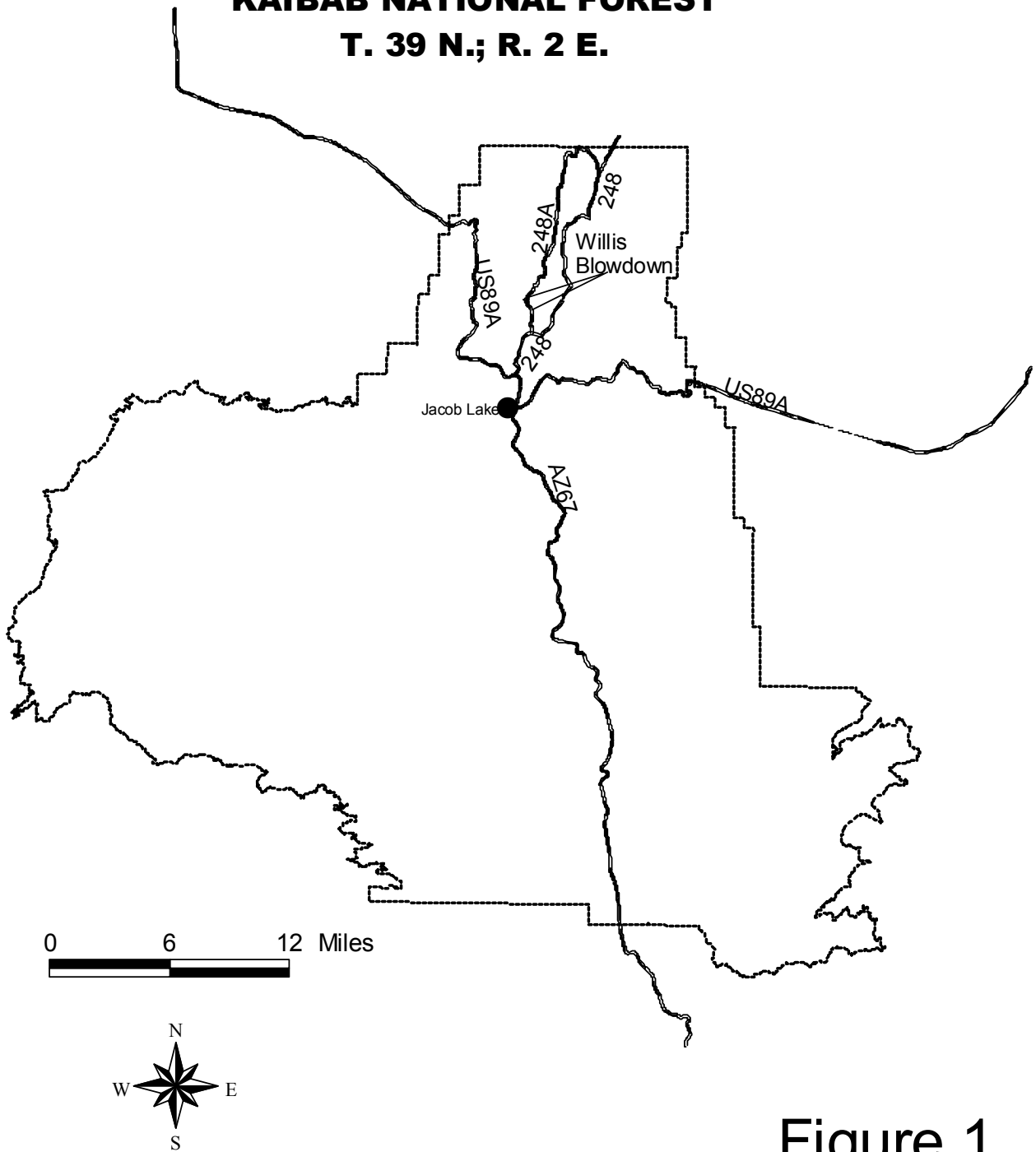
It is my decision to implement the Willis Blow Down Salvage Project (Figure 1) as described below.

The U.S. Forest Service, North Kaibab Ranger District (NKRd) will develop a 2400 3T timber sale contract to remove the down portions of 160 recently killed Ponderosa Pine trees on approximately 38 acres of National Forest System land (see “Treatment Area” on Figure 2 below). Although 26 acres of timber was impacted by the wind event, an additional 12 acres is included in the proposed salvage sale area in order to remove the recently downed timber to access road FR248, for a proposed sale area totaling 38 acres. The additional 12 acres will not have any trees removed from salvage operations, but is needed for accessing the 26 acres for salvage removal. Salvage of these wind killed trees along FR248A in the Cooper Ridge vicinity will: reduce bark beetle infestation risk, reduce wildfire hazards, salvage the merchantable value in the trees to be removed before they deteriorate further, and result in removal of 85 net CCF of wood material. Added benefits include the clearing of designated “keep open” road and repairing approximately ¼ mile of range fence.



Picture 1

**WILLIS BLOWDOWN SALVAGE PROJECT
VICINITY MAP
NORTH KAIBAB RANGER DISTRICT
KAIBAB NATIONAL FOREST
T. 39 N.; R. 2 E.**



PC 10/5/2004

Figure 1

WILLIS BLOW DOWN SALVAGE PROJECT TREATMENT AREA

Figure 2

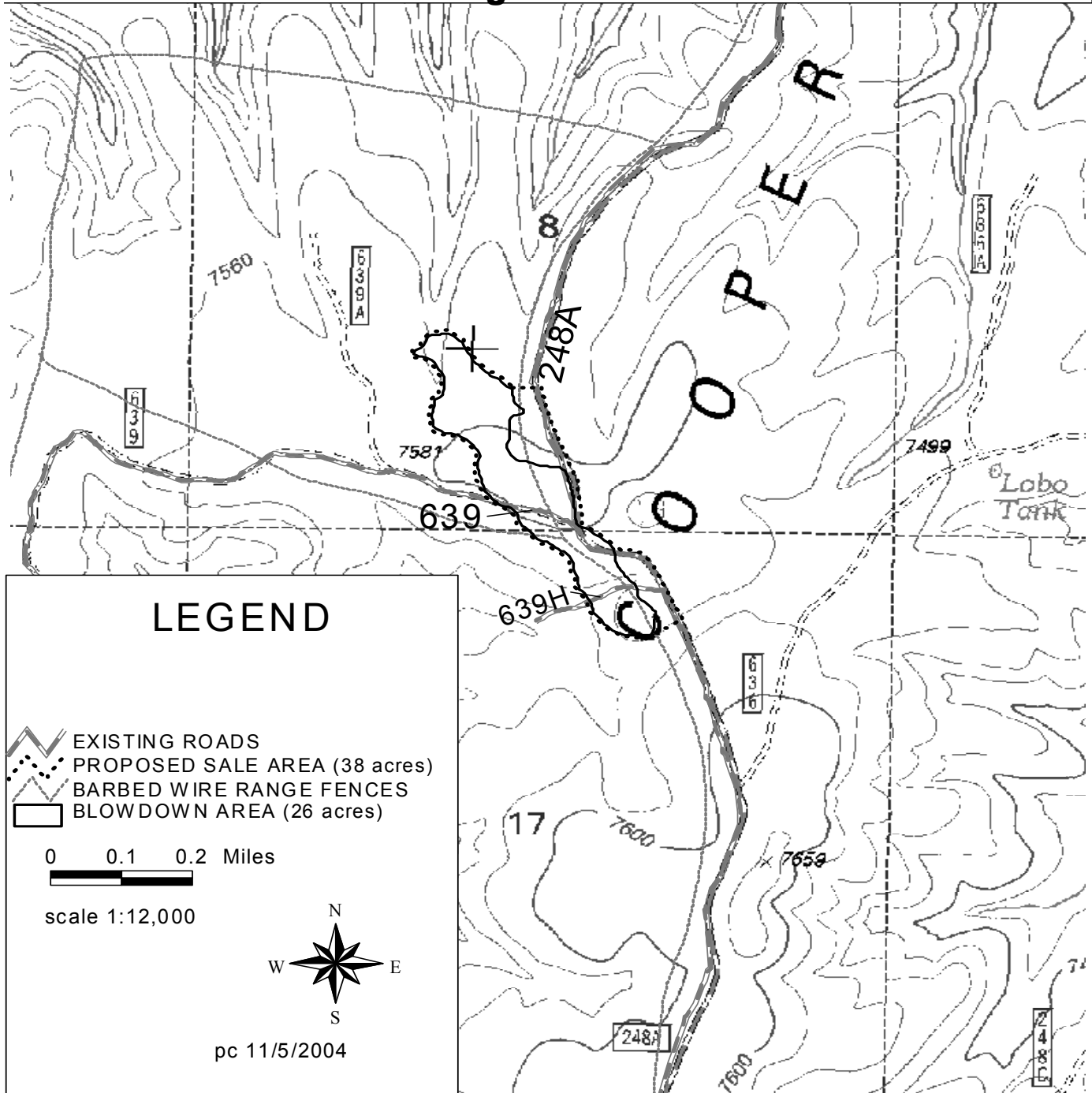


Figure 2 Treatment Areas

My decision includes the following:

Bark Beetle Infestation and Wildfire Risk Reduction

Bark Beetle risk will be reduced by removing the majority of the downed bole wood from 160 recently wind killed trees. The remaining logging slash will be piled and disposed of by burning to prevent further bark beetle brood site risk.

Logging slash produced from the salvage operations will be machine and/or hand piled by timber purchaser. Once the slash piles cure, they will be disposed of by burning. Brush disposal deposits will be collected from a timber purchaser under contract. These deposits will fund Forest Service personnel to later dispose of the slash. All follow-up pile burning will be conducted according to smoke management guidelines as developed by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ).

Deterring Vehicle Access

Concern was expressed that skid trails used for timber removal may be used by hunters, fuel wood gatherers, etc., causing impacts to soils and wildlife. This potential shall be mitigated by placing debris in skid trails to deter vehicle traffic. The purchaser shall perform placement of skid trail debris.

Currently, forest road FR639H is not blocked, but is a designated “closed road”. The general public is currently able to drive this road. The salvage timber sale will provide for the purchaser to use the road to remove timber, and then follow-up by closing the road with debris, thereby improving resource protection from vehicle traffic in the future.

Re-opening Forest Road 639

Currently, FR639 is blocked with downed timber. This road is a designated “keep open” road so the timber sale purchaser will re-open this road, which is commonly used by the range permittee to manage cattle grazing operations.

Cultural Resources

There are no known heritage sites in the proposed timber sale area. The State Historic Preservation Officer has cleared this project (see “Inventory Standards and Accounting – No Properties” form. This form # R3-FS-2300-4a is in the project record).

Wildlife

The District Wildlife Biologist has evaluated the project. It has determined that there will not be any effect to any Forest Service Sensitive Species, Forest Service Management Indicator Species, nor migratory bird species (see the “Biological Evaluation for the Willis Blow Down Salvage Project” and the “NKRD-EZ Project Clearance Form, both in the project record). A portion of the project area occurs within a Northern Goshawk Post Family Fledging Area (PFA). Mitigation will include seasonal restrictions, preventing logging or burning activity within the PFA from March 1 through September 15. An exception to this would be determination that the PFA in this project area is unoccupied, based on field nest surveys conducted after July 15. If the PFA is found to be unoccupied, the District biologist shall document it.

This salvage timber sale will provide for maintaining at least three downed logs per acre at least twelve inches in diameter at midpoint and at least eight feet long. Dead snags that are wind thrown, in addition to existing

down logs before the wind event, will not be removed, ensuring consistency with the Northern Goshawk guidelines.

The standing portions of wind broken trees will be preserved for wildlife, including cavity nesters. Sloughing bark on these snags will provide bat habitat for nesting.

Range

Approximately ¼ mile of barbed wire range fence has been downed from the wind thrown timber. This salvage timber sale will provide for the purchaser to repair this fence, under contract. Salvage operations and fence repair is scheduled to be completed prior to the livestock turn out date of June 15, 2005. This date is the earliest anticipated turn out date, according to the District Range Management Specialist. In the event timber salvage operations are delayed, the timber purchaser will be required, under contract, to ensure pasture integrity be maintained between the Wild Horse and the Willis Burn pastures.

Monitoring

The Kaibab National Forest Land Management Plan (1996) includes a Monitoring Plan. Page 118 states there should be a determination that destructive insects and disease organisms do not increase to unacceptable levels following management activities. The purpose of a monitoring plan will determine:

- 1) If the bark beetle and wildfire risk reduction goal for the project area was achieved by prescribed forest plan management activities (was timber removed, slash treated and disposed of).

Monitoring activities will be conducted to determine whether the project was implemented as designed, and to verify effectiveness of management treatment activities to ensure they are achieving the desired results or mitigation measure. Monitoring will occur on the project as summarized in the following table:

Objective	Method	Timing/Frequency
<p>Bark Beetle and Wildfire Risk Monitoring: To ensure these risks are minimized as specified in the project NEPA document.</p> <p><u>Implementation Monitoring</u> To ensure the bark beetle and wildfire risk caused by the wind thrown timber is minimized in the Willis Blow Down Salvage Sale project area.</p>	<p>The Field presence of Forest Service Sale Administrator and Fire Crews. A certified Timber Sale Administrator will document all timber salvage and slash piling activities in writing. District fire personnel will document follow-up slash pile burning in writing.</p>	<p>During and after contract salvage operations, including the piling and burning of piled logging slash.</p>

<u>Effectiveness Monitoring</u> To determine if the project is effective in meeting the forest and range protection goal specified in the KNFLMP.	Field visits to the project area to identify bark beetle and wildfire risks that threaten adjacent timber stands.	Before and after completion of treatment operations.
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Finding of No Extraordinary Circumstances

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment as per FSH 1909.15 Sec. 31.2(13): *Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction.*

The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects, which may significantly effect the environment (see Willis Blow Down Salvage Finding of No Extraordinary Circumstances in the project record).

I considered bark beetle infestation risk, wildfire risk, slash disposal and smoke management, transportation system issues, cultural resources, potential impacts on Northern Goshawk and other wildlife, and range management when making my decision.

This project will not effect threatened or endangered species or their habitat, Forest Service Management Indicator Species, Forest Service sensitive species, nor migratory bird species (see project record).

Public Involvement

The district contacted two interest groups by telephone in October and November 2004. Both groups voiced concerns about maintaining adequate Northern Goshawk coarse down woody debris evenly distributed in, and adjacent to, the project area, although field surveys show that the project area currently has sufficient down woody debris not designated for removal (see “Willis Blow Down Salvage Project Coarse Down Woody Debris Survey for NOGO Prey Base” in project record).

One group voiced concern about timber extraction skid trails later being used by the public, causing undesirable resource damage. This concern is being addressed and mitigated by debris placement in skid trails, following water barring and native grass seeding. No other issues or concerns were identified as a result of this scoping process (see “Scoping Comments for the Willis Blow Down Salvage Project” in the project record).

Findings Required By And/Or Related To Other Laws and Regulations

This decision complies with all applicable laws and regulations including:

Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act) – The Forest Plan has been reviewed in consideration of this project. This decision is responsive to the forest and rangeland protection planning

principle in the NFMA regulations (36 CFR 219.10 (b)) used in the planning process of the Forest Plan (page 1), as summarized in the Background section of this document on page 1.

Endangered Species Act/Sensitive Species (Forest Service Manual 2670) – This decision will have “no effect” on any threatened, endangered, proposed, forest sensitive species or migratory bird species. (see the “Willis Blow Down Salvage Sale NKRD EZ Project Clearance Form”, the “Biological Evaluation for the Willis Blow Down Salvage Sale”, and the “Wildlife Report for the Willis Blow Down Salvage Project Categorical Exclusion Project File”, all in the project record).

Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas – This decision complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act. Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision (see “Inventory Standards and Accounting – No Properties” form, and the heritage portion of the “NKRD EZ Project Clearance Form”, both in the project record). There will be no effects to archaeological resources. The Forest consulted with potentially affected tribes. No tribal concerns were identified for this project (see “SOPA Meeting with Paiute Tribe Resource Staff” and “Minutes for Hopi NEPA Annual Meeting” in the project record.)

Administrative Review Or Appeal

This decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12.f.

Implementation Date

This decision may be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Paul Callaway at the North Kaibab Ranger District (Address: P.O. Box 248, Fredonia, AZ 86022; or by phone at (928) 643-7395; or by e-mail: pcallaway@fs.fed.us).

Signature and Date

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is one of the project categories identified in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.2 (13) and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Planning Record.

/s/ Jill Leonard
JILL LEONARD
District Ranger

February 3, 2005
Date

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